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EDITORIAL COMMENT

T is now certain that Markova and Dolin will be ppearing with Sadler's Wells Ballet at Covent rden during June. This news means quite different ngs for those who saw them before the war and ose to whom they are only names with great repu- ions attached. It is nearly a decade since they last nced in London and time does not stand still. From nat one has heard recently from America, Markova, e sparkling technician we remember, has become arkova the wraith, an incarnation of the Romantic Ballet hographs. I hope the Covent Garden management will e to it that she makes her re-appearance at the Royal era House in *Giselle*, for her second act is already legen- ry and we have not in this country seen an ethereal llerina for many years—not in fact since she left us.

After weeks of uncertainty it is now definite that dler's Wells Ballet will not be going to the United ates in the autumn. There seems to have been a od deal of misunderstanding over the whole episode, r it appears that there was never any question of the etropolitan Opera House being available. The invita- n was for Sadler's Wells to take part in the New rk Golden Jubilee Celebration Dance Festival and e theatre where it was proposed that they should nce was the City Center of Music and Drama. though both the Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo and llet Theatre have had seasons there it is most unsuit- le for ballet and it would have been impossible to unt either *The Sleeping Beauty* or *Giselle*. The vernors of Sadler's Wells evidently felt, with some stification, that the company whose London home is e Royal Opera House should make their début at the etropolitan or not go at all, and the fact that their l-length classical ballets could not be shown at the bstitute theatre proposed was doubtless the deciding tor in cancelling the whole arrangement.

Sadler's Wells Ballet are paying a short visit to lland this month when they will play two or three rformances each at Amsterdam, Rotterdam and the gue. Miss Paula Balma, editor of the Dutch ballet gazine *Danskroniek*, will write about their visit in the ıy issue of *Ballet Today*. This number will also ntain a special article by Walter Gore on the Ballet Rambert in Australia where they continue to triumph.

Too late for review in the usual place I have received two books from Mr. Beaumont. The first is No. 11 in his series *Essays on Dancing and Dancers*, the subject being Margot Fonteyn, who well deserves the honour. Mr. Beaumont's appraisal of her is penetrating, just, and an object lesson in well-balanced analysis. With its nine beautiful photographs, Miss Fonteyn's thousands of admirers will find this book well worth the six shillings. The other book comes via Mr. Beaumont from M. Gérard Mulys, well remembered here as a leading member of the Nouveau Ballet de Monte Carlo. Called *Vie des Ballets de Monte Carlo*, it is in the nature of a memorial to the late René Blum and the company which he and Massine formed after the latter's split with Colonel de Basil. There is a brief foreword on Blum by M. Mulys and he has provided the captions for the photographs of which the rest of the book is composed. These show that wonderful company (which included Massine himself, Danilova, Markova, Slavenska, Youskevitch, Franklin and Panaieff), at work, in performance and at play. I believe that there are just a few copies over here, the equivalent English price being about 16s. I shall certainly treasure my copy.

I was also delighted to receive from Russia recently an advance copy of a volume on the history of the Bolshoi Theatre. There is a section written by Yuri Bakhrushin, son of the founder of the Theatre Museum, which, I am informed, is the first time a complete history of the Moscow Ballet has ever been published. Unfortunately most of the photographs are very badly reproduced, but do give some idea of the many famous dancers who have appeared there over a period of fifty or sixty years.

News comes from Moscow of the death in January of Vladimir Golubov (Potapov), the leading Russian ballet critic and essayist, at the early age of thirty-nine. He was the scenarist of the new big Soviet ballet, *Militza*, and was able to see it just once before he died. He had finished his book on Ulanova but did not live to see it published.

The first half of a two-part article on Madame Agrippina Vaganova, most famous of all present-day teachers, appears on Page 25. A Jubilee performance to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of Madame Vaganova's début was given at the Kirov Theatre, Leningrad, on February 29th.

I should like to mention here that the pictures illustrating the article on The Ballet Dress in the January issue of *Ballet Today* were all (with the exception of the one of Mary Ellen Moylan) from the famous Raymond Mander and Joe Mitchenson Theatre Collection.

P.W.M.

The action photograph by Hans Wild on the cover is of "Scènes de Ballet" at Covent Garden.

SADLER'S WELLS BALLET AT COVENT GARDEN

By MARY CLARKE

FREDERICK ASHTON'S *Scènes de Ballet*, first produced at Covent Garden on February 11th, is not, as it stands, a masterpiece. It falls short of that stature because among its component parts of music, choreography, decoration and dancing, only the first two are entirely in sympathy with each other. It cannot be too vigorously insisted that no ballet is a success unless every part of it is successful, but having made that point I would like to give to Frederick Ashton the credit which, it seems to me, he deserves for his choreography in *Scènes de Ballet*.

It is choreography in quite a different vein from *Symphonic Variations* and is considerably more complex—although at first sight it may seem a mere frothy trifle in comparison with the Olympian beauty of the earlier ballet. *Scènes de Ballet*, one feels, is Ashton's answer to the vogue for ballets of psychological torment and dreadful import. It is a restatement of his creed that *ballet is dancing*, but it is more than mere reaffirmation in that it does attempt and succeed in a form of composition that Ashton has not previously used. He has taken his clue from Stravinsky's description of the music as "patterned after the forms of the classical dance, free of any given literary or dramatic argument" and he has let his mind play over the classic dance as he has known it in all its manifestations from Petipa right up to Balanchine and even his own serious ballets, so that this most delicate of parodies is also Ashton's homage to the classic dance. (It is Beaurepaire's lack of homage to classicism that is the main defect of his designs.)

The ballet uses a ballerina and a *danseur* supported by a *corps de ballet* of twelve girls and four boys. It begins in enormous grandeur with the *danseur* and four boys on the stage ; the movement is clean cut and austere. The twelve girls enter in fours and there is a passage for the whole *corps* of great staccato complexity. The ballerina enters at the end of a long line of girls, travels rapidly forward and dances with speed and brilliance. Although the choreography is not formally divided into variations, the ballerina and *danseur* are occasionally detached from the rest to provide fragmentary *pas de deux* or *pas seuls* and there is a charming *pas de six* for the ballerina and five men. The whole ballet is composed with expert technical skill and is as exciting as a passage of brilliant orchestral scoring. Movement is stated in one corner of the stage, echoed in another, repeated elsewhere with a slight variation and sometimes caught up into a mass onrush of beautifully correlated dancing. Ashton has never before used a *corps de ballet* with such complexity and it was not surprising that on the first night the audience was left breathless and uncertain. One implores them, however, to give the choreography some study : any ballet lover worth his salt should be prepared to wrestle with choreography that is not superficially titillating for the sake of the rewards that will come when he has sought out the heart of its mystery.

Unfortunately in *Scènes de Ballet* Ashton's achievement is sabotaged by Andre Beaurepaire's designs. Beaurepaire is a very young artist who has previously done his best stage work in Paris under the guidance of M. Jean Cocteau. His failure to maintain his own standard when working alone in a foreign land underlines not only his immaturity but also our own lack, at Covent Garden, of anyone capable of genuine artistic direction. The way in which the first night pavilion, lonely in the middle of the stage, was, by the very next performance, replaced by a larger piece of scenery, indicates that the setting was not deemed ideal—but it needs more drastic revision than tinkering and patching. While the set, in its present form, is merely nondescript, however, the costumes actively detract from the choreography and one suspects that her piercingly yellow tutu may be partly to blame for Fonteyn's comparative ineffectiveness in the chief role. She adopts a mocking Parisian glitter that sits ill upon her natural lyricism and she smiles far too broadly and far too much. Her dancing, too, lacks the sharpness of attack and the diamond-hard brilliance that the choreography seems to call for. Michael Somes also seems a little unhappy. He starts with just the right strength of attack but, as usually happens to him in a purely classical part where he has neither character nor mood to sustain him, he lapses at times into an uncomfortable rigidity of movement. His partnering is excellent, as always. Although lacking technical exactness, I thought Moira Shearer's performance caught the feeling of the ballet more nearly than Fonteyn's. She has never looked lovelier and she realises that the mood is not in the least romantic. The four cavaliers, John Field, Alexander Grant, Philip Chatfield and Donald Britton, make the most of their extremely effective share in this wonderful work.

The December-January revival of *The Sleeping Beauty*

ntre. MARGOT FONTEYN AND MICHAEL SOMES. *Left to right.* ALEXANDER GRANT, JOHN FIELD, PHILIP CHATFIELD AND DONALD BRITTON

SCENES DE BALLET *Action photographs by Edward Mandinian*

Below. MARGOT FONTEYN AND MICHAEL SOMES LEADING THE CORPS DE BALLET

should have brought home to everyone that Sadler's Wells Ballet do not at present possess sufficient experienced dancers to warrant the quantities of alternative casts they persist in offering. Are we never to be allowed just one performance in which all the alternative Auroras will play fairies to their prima ballerina? Fonteyn is still unique in sheer conscious artistry and control ; Moira Shearer, who started shakily, was, by the end of the revival dancing with a new freedom—although she still holds too much in reserve and must pay a great deal more attention to her arms. Beryl Grey gave one excellent performance. Violetta Elvin's is as yet a very tentative Aurora but it contains so much of beauty that one awaits its development with confidence. Among the pleasing interpretations of subsidiary roles were May's Lilac Fairy, Bedells' Countess, Field's manly Florestan and Elvin's Blue Bird. Respecting the less pleasing performances it may be helpful to list a few misconceptions of Petipa's characters. The partner of the Blue Bird is an enchanted Princess and not a vigorous Amazon ; the "finger" variation is not intended to represent the Fairy of the Atom Bomb ; the Lilac Fairy is neither a head prefect nor, in the Vision Scene, Mrs. Grundy and, in the seventeenth century, kings were *royal*.

The only major change in the rest of the repertoire was Harold Turner's appearance as the Miller in *The Three-Cornered Hat*. In the twenty-nine years since the creation of this part only one dancer, Leon Woizikovsky, has successfully replaced Massine, and to say that Turner gives a creditable performance is therefore high praise. He dances well, gets the feel of the character and has great personal gaiety and charm on the stage. But he turns the irony to pleasantry and one misses the bite and fire of Massine's hair-trigger timing and the great force of personality.

On the night I saw Turner dance, *The Three-Cornered Hat* was followed by a performance of *Symphonic Variations* so magically beautiful that I would like to record it, if only as a token of appreciation to the dancers who, on this occasion, were Fonteyn, Shearer, Lindsay, Somes, Grant and Hart.

SADLER'S WELLS THEATRE BALLET

ANTHONY BURKE continues his policy of picking up everything he can remember from past ballets and collecting them together to make one of his own. His new example, *Parures* (first night, January 21st) is a *mélange* of classical choreography from Petipa to Ashton, with a cross-section of what appears to be a study of "Balanchine groupings" culled from the American dance press. Heaven knows a choreographer is just about the rarest bird in the world, and the smallest talent must be encouraged and cherished, but I have still to observe one single original idea springing from the brain of Mr. Burke. After sitting through *Parures* I feel I know what a complete vacuum is. The stage is full of energetic young people (and how energetic they are!), the boys leaping like mountain goats and the girls spinning and shooting out their legs, and none of it, I repeat, none of it means anything at all ever. The Tchaikovsky Theme and Variations from his Suite in G was a tricky choice of music as it is almost impossible not to tick off mentally each variation as it comes along. There seemed to be a lot more than I remembered. I gained an idea from the costumes that Miss Vivienne Kernot might be able to do something exciting with a genuine classical ballet if ever given the chance.

What a relief it was to recognise, thirty seconds after the curtain went up on *Les Rendezvous* which followed, that easy mastery of style which the young Frederick Ashton of 1933 already possessed. He was then, I suppose, about the same age as Anthony Burke is now. Of course he had Markova and Idzikowski, de Valois and a buoyant Robert Helpmann just popping out of the *corps de ballet*, but looking back it seems that the company then had far less reserves of technique to call upon than is the case today. Yet he could make this lovely, witty, *original* thing which fourteen years later stands as an object lesson for all who care to meditate a little. I don't know whether it was the contrast with the preceding ballet, or seeing dancers who are entirely fresh to it and are therefore tackling it with no backward glances, but I received more pleasure from this performance (in spite of an atrocious third décor) than any I have had since Markova left. I find this young company over-exuberant to a sometimes alarming degree, but how alive and enthusiastic they are! It suddenly came back to me that this was how we felt when *Les Rendezvous* was a new ballet in an almost new theatre and we were all a great deal younger. Though no one will ever have the secret of Markova's lilt from toe to heel, Elaine Fifield for all her present inexperience comes nearest to satisfying me in this exacting but proportionately rewarding role, and Michael Boulton dances beautifully in Idzikowski's part. His development of personality is not at the moment keeping pace with his growing control of technique; however there is every reason to believe that this will come. In any case I am prepared to prophesy here and now that in him we have at last found our English Blue Bird.

P.W.M.

BALLET THEATRE'S PRODUCTION OF "PRINCESS AURORA", ADAPTED FROM THE LAST ACT OF "THE SLEEPING PRINCESS"

THE AMERICAN BALLET SCENE

By HERBERT J. CURTIS

BALLET Theatre is at present touring the United States with a repertoire of about thirty ballets. these, two are recent productions and one a revival. e new ballets are : *Summer Day* with choreography Jerome Robbins, music by Prokofiev, and costumes d properties by John Boyt, and *Theme and Variations*, th choreography by Balanchine, music by Tchaikovsky heme and Variations from Suite No. 3), and décor Woodman Thompson. The revival is yet another rsion of *Princess Aurora*. The spring season of Ballet eatre at the Metropolitan Opera House, New York, hich begins on April 4th, will see a revival of Eugene ring's *Billy the Kid* and a new work by Tudor, set to ahler's *Lied von der Erde*. This is titled *Shadow of the nd* and will have settings by Jo Mielziner. There ll also probably be Agnes de Mille's new ballet based the life of Lizzie Borden, with music by Morton Gould. *Summer Day* is a *pas de deux* representing the imitation professional dancers by children. The musical companiment is provided by a piano on stage. The ly other objects are two chairs and a music rack. On e latter are two pairs of shoes. The children bring to the stage a box containing numerous small proper- s. They put on the shoes and begin their improvisa- ns with the help of the properties, amongst them ing a pair of gauze wings, a large white bow and a all one. With these the children enact a brief ody of *Les Sylphides*. The small bow is for the nist. The most interesting imitation is one of a aracter dance in which the children use tambourines unusual rhythmic effects. Finally the children urn the properties to the box and put their shoes back on the music rack. The boy lifts the girl over his shoulder, picks up the box and walks off. This little *pas de deux* is hardly to be called a ballet and yet, as performed by Ruth Ann Koesun and John Kriza, it is an amusing piece.

Balanchine's *Theme and Variations* is seriously handicapped by extremely poor scenery and costumes which tend to distract attention from the choreography. This is a pure ballet, an essay in the movement of the human form in a prescribed space. The backdrop, representing a formal garden between two low colonnades, and the use of pink and lavender costumes for the *corps de ballet*, serve only to obscure the patterns. The ballet is in the form of a classical *pas de deux* supported by a *corps de ballet*, the variations of the solo dancers being set off by numbers for the rest of the dancers. There is little of the integration of the choreography of soloists and group which Balanchine so well achieves in other of his pure ballets. The choreography makes frequent use of the intertwining of a line of dancers holding hands and there are a number of unusual combinations of familiar steps. The ballet is well danced, particularly by the soloists, Alicia Alonso and Igor Youskevitch, and contains interesting passages, but gives the general impression of having been pieced together from scraps of Balanchine's other ballets. With new décor it would undoubtedly be a far more interesting work.

In a ballet so episodic as *Princess Aurora* it is necessary that every section be well performed and that the entire ballet be bound together by a single style of performance. Ballet Theatre's present revival has not

overcome such difficulties. In content it is similar to the former production, except that the Rose Adagio is now placed in the middle of the ballet, the *pas de deux* of Aurora and the Prince is restored, and a new variation for the Lilac Fairy and the Prince has been added. In spite of the fact that the ballet *in toto* is not very successful, there are several redeeming features. One is the excellent Bluebird of Alonso and Youskevitch. Another is Nora Kaye's Aurora. Her performance is somewhat uneven, particularly in the use of her arms, but she gives to the role a great deal of the grandeur without which it degenerates into a mockery of royalty.

Alonso's Giselle is improving rapidly and is, in fact, already first rate. To audiences familiar with Markova's miraculous Giselle it may seem that Alonso's acting leaves something to be desired ; however, only in the mad scene is she at present noticeably inferior, and it is my opinion that she will certainly overcome this deficiency. As Albrecht, Youskevitch has no equal in this country. His performance is restrained, dramatically sensitive and technically flawless.

The present position of Ballet Theatre with regard to the quality of its dancers is a strong one. In Kaye and Alonso the company has two first rate ballerinas, both now approaching their prime. It is significant that both have risen from the ranks of the company. Kaye is the more versatile dancer, but although Alonso is known chiefly as a classical dancer it must be pointed out that her successes have not been confined to that field alone. The pre-eminence of Youskevitch in the classical ballet is unquestioned, and his value to the company, consequently, is great. For *ballon*, for clean and open beats and masterful partnering he is in a class by himself. His presence has, temporarily at least, drawn attention from Kriza who, though not a brilliant classical dancer, is an acceptable one. He has excelled in the newer ballets by American choreographers. Laing is now dancing a greater number of roles than previously and is especially valuable for his dancing in the Tudor ballets.

The Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo is offering three new ballets this season : *Cirque de Deux*, choreography by Ruthanna Boris, music from Gounod's *Faust*, décor by Robert Davison, *Madronos*, choreography by Antonia Cobos, music by Moskowski, Yradier and others, costumes by Castillo, and *Lola Montez*, choreography by Edward Caton, music by Fred Witt, décor by Raoul Pene duBois.

Of these *Cirque de Deux* is by far the best. It is in the form of the classical *pas de deux* but there are also two extra dancers who assist the principals. The

RUTH ANN KOESUN AND JOHN KRIZA IN "SUMMER DAY", A NEW PAS DE DEUX BY JEROME ROBBINS
Photograph by Alfredo Valente

ALICIA ALONSO AND IGOR YOUSKEVITCH IN THE BLUEBIRD PAS DE DEUX
Photograph by Alfredo Valente

hotograph by Eileen Darby

ALICIA ALONSO AND IGOR YOUSKEVITCH IN THE NEW BALANCHINE BALLET, "THEME AND VARIATIONS"

urtain rises to reveal the two dancers posed on a small ircular platform with two poles bearing streamers and upporting a large banner on which is written "Cirque e Deux" in ornate lettering. At either side stand the ages. The ballerina wears a pink tutu and her partner pink jacket with blue tights. This low platform is n hidden wheels and is capable of having its floor evolved independently of the base. The *danseur* upports the ballerina in an *arabesque*, but does not urn her ; instead one of the pages rotates the platform. his is repeated several times, and although it has an un-eniably humorous effect it is nevertheless an interesting se of the stage property. This opening is concluded y the departure of the principals and by a short umber for the pages. The lights dim, there is a roll f drums and the spotlight picks up the man as he nters at the back and mounts the platform. At the limax of the drum roll, instead of leaping from the latform, he merely steps off to one side. Then ollows his solo, which contains references to the ghtrope and the trapeze. When he has concluded, he ballerina makes her entrance in a similar manner. er solo is suggestive of a bare-back rider. The ballet ends with a brilliant *pas de deux* for the principals, a shorter one for the pages and a final parade and bow to the audience.

Ruthanna Boris and Leon Danielian give a witty and technically fine performance. On some occasions the principal parts have been taken by Mary Ellen Moylan and Frank Hobi with an almost equal success.

Madronos is a formal set of pseudo-Spanish dances, performed in rich and colourful costumes before a plain backdrop. The ballet serves as an excellent showpiece for the principal dancers: Krassovska, Franklin, Danielian and Boris. This ballet does not pretend to be a major work but does succeed in being an interesting and colourful group of dances.

Lola Montez is a complete failure. The music is dead, the story has nothing to do with Lola Montez and the choreography is a senseless hash of every kind and style of dancing imaginable. The ballet is so bad that not even Danilova and Franklin can extract anything of interest from it.

The heart of the Ballet Russe repertoire continues to be the group of ballets by Balanchine. For the most part they are excellently performed by first dancers and

(Continued on page 30)

STYLE IN MALE DANCING 150 YEARS AGO—AND TODAY

By MICHAEL CAREY

MR. C. W. BEAUMONT in his indispensable *Complete Book of Ballets* gives, in the cast for the first performance of *Les Amours d'Antoine et de Cléopâtre* the dancer Charles Vestris as being the Antony of the evening. But it is stated in a contemporary review *Memorial Dramatique* that this dancer made his début, at the age of sixteen, in 1810—whereas *Les Amours* was given in 1808. Since one of the aims of this article is to suggest that historical accuracy is *not* the most stimulating or useful factor in the study of past dancers and ballets, I propose to shock the Handmaids of Chronology by assuming that Auguste Vestris was the artist in the above case, thus exercising our dusty imaginations. Let us imagine then that we are sitting in the auditorium of the Opera in the Paris of 1808—then the Académie Royale de Musique. The curtains part to reveal the magnificent set of the first act, it is laid in the court of Anthony and he is receiving the Egyptian Ambassadors—the stage is crowded with many dancers and the colours so brilliant as to err on the side of vulgarity. We are able to distinguish the great Auguste as he stands dismissing the ambassadors with the flourish of stylised classical mime; a small, muscular man no longer in his prime but with all its confidence and the showmanship of experience. How does he compare now with the young Auguste described by Noverre as possessing such qualities as, "aplomb, boldness, brilliant strength, clean, well defined steps, and a sensitive and accurate ear"? Does he carry his years as well as Massine today, who at 51 can still amaze us with his supple *demi-caractère* dancing, or has he developed the sluggishness of the less fortunate man who is *passé* at 40? Apparently Vestris was one of the latter, but the role we have in imagination is calculated to show little of his deterioration for in the same year a contemporary actor wrote: "If Vestris was a mere acrobat—a jack-in-the-box, a pirouettist—then his hour would be sounded; his extreme lightness and suppleness made him famous all over Europe; . . . but Vestris has the good fortune to add to his physical talent that of great dramatic ability which is less affected by the progress of time; and here our young acrobats of today have far to go before they surpass him." It is clear, at any rate then, that our Antony will have the nobility, the breadth of gesture, and the strength of personality to justify the voluptuous cavortings of a thousand Cleopatras.

For the rest of the production we can picture the swirl of pattern and colour regaling our eyes at the close of Act 2 with the Egyptians setting out to meet the Romans. Mr. Lemaistre, a visitor to Paris in 1802, gives an impressive idea of such a spectacle: "If the French ballet has a decided advantage over the english [*sic*], it arises from the great art and neatness with which they contrive to fill the stage. It is not an unusual thing to see in processions or dances, which require a pomp of show, 200 persons assembled at a time, all of whom are admirably drilled, that the whole proceeds with the utmost regularity." A figure which makes even the recent *Sleeping Beauty corps de ballet* shrivel to the proportion of chamber ballet!

Having glanced at our performance at the Paris Opera we have inevitably encountered one of the Vestrises. This extraordinary family produced four male dancers of whom three became well known in Paris. The first was of course the great Gaeten; he came with his family from Italy and studied with Dupré whose position of *premier danseur* at the Opera he eventually took himself. Of Dupré we have an interesting description in the Memoirs of Casanova: " . . . he slowly raised his rounded and graceful arms, opened, extended and closed them, moved his feet with precision and lightness, took a few small steps, made some *battements* and *pirouettes*, and disappeared like the summer breeze." It is possible to create a more complete picture of the dancing of Gaeten than perhaps any other contemporary *danseur*. Here for example are phrases from newspapers concerning his dancing in a ballet, *Les Amours des Dieux* in 1757: " . . . he executes his steps with all the grace and voluptuousness called for, and inspired by the music," " . . . he holds one's attention and creates a perfect illusion . . . his solos are so much in keeping with the style of the ballet that it would be imperfect without them," and finally, " . . . the brilliance of his steps, the neatness of his positions, and the picturesque style of his dancing." He was clearly a wonderful stylist; we read that his son, Auguste, surpassed him in elevation and *pirouettes*—but never in style.

The third Vestris to achieve success, though to a lesser degree, was Charles, nephew of Gaeten; here is a vivid description of him at the age of twelve making his début in Paris:

" . . . he has a fine chest, the stomach well held in,

arms gracefully rounded, and he is well 'turned out' as they say of dancers; when he leaps the upper part of his body remains gracefully placed and relaxed, just as in his static poses. He has, in a word, all the advantages which benevolent nature and hard work can confer."

There were of course various other *danseurs* of ability to rival the Vestrises, as for example, Duport, Deshayes and Albert, to mention but three. The latter, a successor rather than a contemporary to Auguste Vestris, was *premier danseur* at the Paris Opera in 1817. John Ebers speaks highly of him in his *Seven Years of the King's Theatre*: " . . . When he appeared there was no recollection of anyone who approached to an equality with him. His physical agility, his symmetrical frame and his good taste combined in making him decidedly the best male performer in the ballet that had appeared in England . . . but Albert's Paris displayed a buoyant elegance of motion that at once stamped him in the public estimation as a first-rate dancer."

The transient nature of theatrical art in general and that of ballet in particular is such that one is forced to reconstruct and imagine the style of a past generation of artists on the evidence of such flimsy extracts as the above; or maybe, if one is lucky, a few not very faithful prints, and on the whims and extravagances of contemporary journalists.

Let us then peer through the wrong end of our cracked and dusty opera glasses and observe these creatures dancing far away at the turn of the eighteenth century: as we watch their leaps and *pirouettes*, looking a trifle odd in their heavy and elaborate costumes—how does all this compare with the French male dancing of today? It must be clear from the above extracts alone that the style has changed considerably. The only two things which seem to remain in common are two essential trends: a marked element of virtuosity in acrobatic facility, that is, for feats of leaping and turning; and most important—a great sense of style. This latter quality causes dancers like Babilée, Petit or Kalioujny to be outstanding when compared with English or American artists not merely for the pleasing veneer style gives to their work, but also it undoubtedly endows their technique with the quality of excitement which is lacking in many other dancers.

I think it most probable that the main difference between the two generations of dancers lies in the source of their techniques: in those days the Russian school of dancing had not reached Europe—that school which has influenced European ballet for fifty years now, with its emphasis on style and dance quality rather than precision of technique. There were then but two streams of teaching in Paris. Firstly, the old established dancers of mainly French lineage dating back to Lully and the establishment of the Opera: it was this school which suffered the attacks of Noverre, who poured scorn upon their conventional and meaningless routines of steps having no dramatic value or imagination. The dancer Dupré, mentioned above, was possibly one of the last of this line; one rather imagines a somewhat "top heavy" dancer with great precision of footwork and somewhat stiff and formal upper body movements.

The second and more powerful influence was probably that of the Vestrises whose family descended upon Paris from Florence round about 1740. Whilst the father of the family, Gaeten, received most of his training from Dupré it is certain that he carried with him a smattering of the quick precision of the Italians, and that this coloured his style; also he was strongly influenced by Noverre and would therefore have resisted the stiff formalism of the old French court ballet. To the writer there is but one constant impression emerging from the snatches of criticism and description which survive from the Vestris period, it is a picture of figures dancing with a quality of quicksilver and one very different from that of our contemporary ballet—the women in their long and rather cumbersome dresses drifting through the strong and yet elegant and precise dance patterns of the men, the whole being still very close to the social dances of the fading aristocracy and owing most of its theatrical brilliance to the male dancers who would be eager to exploit the newly developed *tours de force*—these latter still being regarded as tricks and thus calling for great precision in their execution.

AUGUSTE VESTRIS AS COLAS IN THE BALLET "NINETTE À LA COUR"

On turning to the modern French *danseur* one finds, least of all, precision; the studios of Paris are notorious for their lack of discipline, and male dancers are much more interested in how many *pirouettes* they can turn than in the position of the body when turning. This carelessness in their dance positions seems to matter very little somehow, indeed it enhances the general effect, giving a soft nonchalance—a pantherlike quality to their movement. Their style of dancing is undoubtedly derived from the Russian school; this becomes understandable when one realises that the main Parisian teachers are Russian—Egorova, Preobrajenska, Volinine. Added to this there is the conclusive fact that nine out of ten French male dancers model their style on that of Serge Lifar—sometimes to the point of being slightly ridiculous: the heavy languid carriage; the head slightly drooping, the arms in typical positions, and a doglike attitude of romanticism to the ballerina. All this can be a trifle humorous in a classical *pas de deux*! Whilst this style of Lifar's is probably fifty per cent. his own affectation there undoubtedly remains a solid half of good Russian showmanship and dance quality: he was not principal dancer for Diaghilev without good reason!

Having looked in the obvious place for the descendants of the Vestris generation with little success we naturally wonder if any contemporary male dancer outside France can remind us of this style: it may well be that the Italian ballet can give such an example. I am unable to make any observations in that direction however. It remains for me to produce a pet heresy—to find cause for comparison to the *danseur* of 1800, not in the contemporary classical school of dance but in the so-called "Central European" school of movement: in a dancer produced by the Ballet Jooss, Hans Zullig. He offers us no amazing feats of turning—no brilliant *pirouettes* spinning until one watches, breathless, for the stop. No brisk double *tours en l'air* giving an appearance of a hidden clockwork in the shoulders. The most we get from Zullig by way of athletic appeasement is a slow single turn whose strength gives one the impression that it is the easiest movement possible—whereas in reality it takes as long to acquire as the ten *pirouettes* of the virtuoso. More to the orthodox balletomane's taste are his beautiful leaps, executed with a fine clean line and the hip-high elevation of a finished classical *danseur*.

HANS ZULLIG IN "BIG CITY", SKETCHED BY JANE

HANS ZULLIG IN "A SPRING TALE", SKETCHED BY JANE

I have observed above that the main factor which distinguishes the style of the late 18th century male dancer from his modern contemporary lies not in the acrobatic development of technique but in his style of movement—its facility and speed. It is just this quality of quicksilver agility and mathematically precise "placing" of line which I feel that Zullig alone of our male dancers possesses. That Zullig should raise an echo from the silent pages of Noverre when dancing in his own delightful *Le Bosquet* is perhaps reasonable since it is a work based on that of Noverre's masters; but it is surely strange that one should catch glimpses of the style of the meaningless but charming

and courtly versions of Greek myths in France of 1800, in performances today of ballets packed with subtly conveyed ideology and often rather grotesque movement of the genre of *The Green Table*.

The speculations provoked by the subject of this article have a rabbit-like tendency to multiply and may well fall victim to the fox of historical fact: I must stem my own train of ideas, therefore, by making the plea which I implied at the beginning. Namely, let us occasionally ignore the existence of the fox and give rein to a little healthy imagination. The tendency to treat the history of past dancers as a mere catalogue is far too popular—with some writers it is an obsession of the kind which causes people to collect antique dishes or match boxes. This may be admirable for personal sublimation, but why inflict it on the unfortunate ballet-goer who is interested in dancers of flesh and blood? Let there be some attempt to relate the past with the present so that our artists may benefit in their sense of style, and the audiences may widen their view and thus their enjoyment. In the present case one can well imagine the perfection which would result from the fusion of the elegance and speed of the 18th century dancer, as exemplified by Zullig today, with the heavy virile masculinity of the contemporary Franco-Russian school.

ON BALLET CONSIDERED AS ONE OF THE MINOR ARTS

By ALAN STOREY

PART II.

DOMINATING, and to some extent determining, problems of design is the supposedly insurmountable obstacle of impermanence attendant on the lack of a satisfactory system of dance-recording. True, all interpretative performances—either in the concert-hall or on the stage—are, by their natures, transient and irrevocable. But the actor or musician is seldom in doubt as to the subject of his interpretation, since the script or score (with due allowance for printing and other errors) is authoritative; a constant to be referred to on occasions of uncertainty and controversy. Such a constant, however, does not exist in the world of choreography; consequently it is difficult—even impossible—to determine the amount of dissolution that may have occurred in a ballet between any given dates; as the recent Russian Ballet season at Covent Garden proved only too well.

A further aspect of the same problem, often overlooked or more deliberately ignored, is the fortuitous survival of certain ballets together with the seemingly inexplicable disappearance of others of equal if not greater value to the present-day choreographer. After three centuries of existence (during which time the traditions ruling teaching methods and the passing on of important roles from one dancer to another have been maintained without a break), the classical repertoire consists of four works alone, all designed within the last hundred years and, again excepting *Giselle*, during a period of decadence and choreographic sterility. These ballets, *The Sleeping Beauty*, *Swan Lake*, and *Coppélia*, share one thing in common, a lack of choreographic homogeneity and thematic development. "I sought in vain", Bournonville wrote of his visit to the Imperial Ballet, St. Petersburg, in 1875, "for any action, any dramatic interest whatsoever, or, come to that, something which revealed a healthy mind; if I had the luck here and there to come across an element inspired by logic . . . the impression was immediately ruined by those dance exploits which excite the enthusiasm of the audience." On the other hand, the works of Didelot, Noverre, Vigano and Dauberval (all artists, be it noted, who revolted against the inartistic and senseless vulgarities of the *ballet-divertissement* in their experiments with the dance as a medium of expression; seeking to develop action simultaneously with choreographic patterns that were self-subsistent yet emotionally satisfying) have been lost for ever. The loss, I believe may be attributed to two causes—first, the inevitable reversal of artistic taste that accompanies the rise of a new generation and, second, the finely interwoven texture of their media, which must be memorised wholly or not at all. Thus, it would seem, the more complex, the more subtle the ballet, the less chance it has of survival. Our so-called "classics" remain in the modern repertoire, not because they are salutary examples of form and design, but because they are essentially inorganic, extempore spectacles; tawdry settings for virtuoso pieces which, owing to their

academic nature, are easily codified. But—to revert to my first cause—reversals are of a temporary nature; the jejune and the old-fashioned return eventually from oblivion to reveal a hitherto unrealised beauty, a new set of values. Even more important, time-lags come to an end, and works which have suffered ignominious rejection and abuse for perhaps thirty or forty years are accepted finally as masterpieces profoundly influencing the trend of æsthetic exploration. Once a ballet loses popularity, however, it loses its life, and with it all hope of resurrection. For what may appear in later years bearing the same title and using the same score will bear little resemblance to the creator's original intention (c.f. *Les Sylphides*, *Carnaval* and *L'Oiseau de Feu*). The situation is ridiculously like the scene from *Through the Looking-Glass*, in which the Red Queen screams, "Faster! Faster!" until poor Alice, whisked through the air, breathless and giddy, returns to earth only to find herself back where she began. "*Here*, you see", the Queen explains, "it takes all the running *you* can do, to keep in the same place." And, as far as I can see, choreographers will find themselves in precisely the same position until a means is discovered of preserving their work.

A curious analogy exists between the cinema and the ballet. Both are dominated, in the main, by popular taste—the penalties for defiance being, on the one hand, a box-office deficit and, on the other, complete extinction. And yet, in spite of their conventional inanities, seriousness will keep breaking in. Seldom, I repeat, has ballet been regarded with the intellectual respect it has today, by either its devotees or by its creators. It is, so we are informed (and the analogy still holds), a significant form representative of our times; an expressive medium capable of throwing new light on contemporary problems, or, as Mr. Jerome Robbins succinctly puts it, of saying "pertinent things about ourselves and our world no less than a novelist or a playwright . . ." The vital word here is *pertinent*, for Mr. Robbins, in his understandable anxiety to raise ballet to the status of the other arts, rather naïvely disregards the general condition of the drama and novel. Furthermore, he has fallen into Noverre's old error—although indirectly—of desiring to emulate their capabilities. The question naturally arises, is ballet ideally an art of representation? Can it, without resort to alien elements such as pure mime and the spoken word, throw a revealing light on abstract values?

Some of our more socially conscious choreographers believe that it can—or they would have us believe, a different matter altogether; others, notably MM. Balanchine and Lifar, say that it cannot and that it is disastrous to try. The essence of ballet, to the latter, is its insistence on a world of ideal beauty, and its conviction that this is realised through art. "Dancing, which is pre-eminently an art of emotion, cannot tell a story", Lifar declares. "Story-telling with its implied play upon time and place is absolutely and *organically* opposed to dancing, just as it is as well to music . . . Dancing can depict nothing (nor can music) and it certainly cannot convey the infinite shades of human feeling (music is mistress in this sphere)." The implication appears to be that ballet is a transcendental and, therefore, an irrational art; its language, the dance, springing from ecstatic impulses motivated by love, joy, hatred, fear, etc. Balanchine goes even further by expressing disinterest in either representation or emotion; he is not concerned with feeling but with form. Yet, although I recognise his exploitation of choreographic design to be one of the most important manifestations of modern ballet and one which, if it survives, must ultimately govern its technique, I think it is a movement away from ballet-theatre into the region of "pure" dance; even now, one feels, the décor, costumes and music of a Balanchine work are irrelevant—here I disagree with Mr. Kirstein who acclaims Balanchine as a pre-eminently musical choreographer; on the contrary, the choreography of his ballets are no more interpretations of the score (be it that of a Mozart or a Stravinsky concerto) than a train is part of the lines over which it travels. In this respect, by using methods of composition diametrically opposed to those formulated by Lifar, he has advanced much further along the *Icare* path than its inventor. The tendency towards abstractism (itself an anomaly in a physical art; since no movement of the human body can be freed entirely from its associations) of so many choreographers is an unhealthy sign of what Aldous Huxley once described as "art stripped of all 'literary' qualities, reduced to strictly formal elements . . . from which almost every expression of a tragical, a tender sentiment has been excluded—confined to the expression of physical energy, of the lyricism of speed and mechanical motion." But it is not fear of expressing the obvious, of joining the *Kitsch* purveyors, alone that drives them to this preoccupation with the cold mechanicals of their art, but the awareness that they have nothing pertinent to say about life. The *impasse* between technical accomplishment and genuine expression, between form and content is more apparent in ballet than in any other art, not excepting painting and poetry. And the principal reason is not—as Mr. Frank Jackson suggested in a recent issue of *Ballet Today*—that dancers live in a closed circle, but rather that choreographers (who are themselves graduates from the ranks), unlike composers, dramatists and novelists who are free to create wherever they choose, must, perforce, live in the same charmed circle with little or no opportunity for experiencing life at first hand; here again the disadvantage of not having a system of notation to bridge the gap between creative mind and performer is all too apparent.

Lifar remarks incorrectly that dancing can depict nothing; his error lies in not offering a definition of "dancing" and "story-telling". Obviously, in comparison to the drama—or even the opera, ballet is limited in its intellectual and emotional range. It cannot be polemical, for instance; it exists in a perpetual "present"; its imagery is restricted and cannot be inferred by metaphor or simile; nor can an emotional mood be sustained for more than a few moments. On the other hand, with one exception, it can and does employ all the elements essential to story-telling, namely People, Plot, Fantasy, Prophecy, Pattern and Rhythm. These elements are apparent in *Petrouchka*, *Le Tricorne*, and the Jooss and Tudor ballets. Where our socially conscious ballet-makers err is in emphasising the function of plot to the detriment of fantasy, pattern and rhythm, and by ignoring the potential development of character. Their rather dubious intention is to mirror the pedestrian level of existence, to portray as faithfully as possible the world of superficial appearances; this they achieve, leaving us to wonder—as Dr. Johnson wondered at the performing dog—not that it is well done but rather that it is done at all. In reality they have extended the boundaries of intellectualism no more than if they had remained content with its more patent absurdities. For, to adapt a further passage from Mr. Huxley, "The great public derives an extraordinary pleasure from the mere recognition of familiar objects and circumstances. It tends to be somewhat disquieted by works of pure fantasy, whose subject-matter is drawn from other worlds than that in which it lives, moves, and has its daily use . . . each member of the audience must be able to say—with what a solid satisfaction!—'Ah, there's a real shop, there's a docker, that's just like it was when so-and-so took me backstage that time'." Recognisableness is an artistic quality which most people find profoundly thrilling. What it does not understand—this so gullible audience—is that the docker and the stage-hand and the pathological tramp are animated dolls; that although they may behave in a recognisable manner, their behaviour discloses nothing of any value; they are simply pasteboard symbols of something which lacks eternal significance. Put words into their mouths and they become characters in plays and second-feature films which no intelligent audience would sit through. Their hopelessness is increased by the fact that they have no æsthetic value, since they are conceived in pseudo-dramatic terms.

To put the case briefly, ballet's minor and, at present, static position among the arts is due, in the first place, to its essentially transient nature which precludes the æsthetic values of its designs from becoming anything more than arbitrary. For, until a means is devised to preserve the creator's initial conceptions of movement and form, those conceptions cannot be judged or even understood with any degree of certainty. Secondary to this, but of more immediate concern, is the widening gap between technique and expression; between an intense preoccupation with mechanicals on the one hand, and recourse to conventionalism or an alien naturalism on the other. What is more, this naturalism —far from being the product of a direct vision of reality—is, in most cases, a shop-soiled derivation from the popular psychological novel and the more sensational features of pictorial art.

These are the obstacles our choreographers must first surmount before they can convince us that they are creative artists rather than merely talented theatrical producers.

MAM'Z

MARGOT FONTEYN AS MAM'ZELLE ANGOT, AND ALEXANDER GRANT AS THE BARBER

PHOTO-MON

NGOT

ANDINIAN

MOIRA SHEARER AS THE ARISTOCRAT, AND MICHAEL SOMES AS THE CARICATURIST

BALLET IN CENTRAL AFRICA

By HERBERT STONELEY

THROUGH lack of research two things are accepted by most lovers of ballet, which to the seasoned traveller seem far, far wide of the mark. One is that the art of ballet was born comparatively late. The other, that it is foreign to our nation. Could anything be further from the truth? Research would prove that ballet is one of man's oldest art forms, with roots very deep in the soil of life. Most nations have practised it in one form or another from their earliest days. Why! even in Central Africa, tucked away from civilisation by dense forests and giant mountains, and separated from the world by centuries, primitive savages not only practise the ballet, but love it !

Ballet! In Central Africa! Amongst primitive, savage people! Yes, without a doubt, and as fossils show what life existed in any country long, long ago, so the activities and culture of primitive peoples disclose beyond question the pursuits and culture of past ages, so demonstrating how ancient an art is that of dancing and ballet.

Not that savage Africans practise ballet in a modern stage manner. They do however show in their primitive mime and ballet that this art springs from man's two earliest industries—the hunt and agriculture. As with modern ballet, each primitive mime has its special theme. One can recall the Lion, Leopard, Buffalo, Giraffe, Elephant, Hippo, Rhino, or Crocodile, along with other figures. Each lasts several hours. Moreover they are very true to reality, as anyone knows who has actually hunted such animals and lived through the dangers of the chase.

Each starts with a yell from the hundreds of dancers who take part, a yell both startling and terrifying, followed by a wild leap in the air by the leader of the "hunting" dancers, as if it were a call to action, or again, the raising of the curtain. The best dancer of the district is chosen for the "animal". Perhaps because the Natives with whom I lived only danced hunting themes, no woman was chosen to lead. How proudly the leaders danced! Often they will inform one of the numerous animal parts they have performed, just as a ballerina might with justifiable pride, tell the many leading parts she has danced. Believe it or not, they have a ballet leader. A kind of chorus master in charge of the hundreds who dance the mob parts. He regulates the time with a small stick like a conductor's baton, and is assisted by others in charge of various sections. These African ballets are immense affairs with far larger casts than the most ambitious western ballet promoter dare aspire to.

The figures of the dance change with each theme. One noticed the most intricate patterns were danced to those animal hunts offering grave danger to life such as the Lion and Leopard, the Buffalo and Crocodile. Nor were humorous themes neglected. Laughter was suggested by the Elephant, Hippo, and Giraffe themes. One could not view the waddling, stamping, ponderous movements of such animals, or the timorous motions portrayed in the Giraffe theme without assuming they were included for comic relief. That this was a false notion one doubts not, for in the actual chase one found them too startlingly true to be comic. Seen in the midst of a forest clearing, and danced for amusement only, even the most stolid onlooker would be moved to mirth. The Native dancers, perhaps seeing in retrospect many dangers safely passed, often roared with laughter at these figures, though the rest were danced with exaggerated seriousness.

They were danced through a whole afternoon in a temperature nearly 130 degrees in the shade! Many became exhausted, yet recovering dashed wildly into the dance, so much do they love the exercise! A space was always marked out in the arena for the "base" or "village" from which the hunt started. At first the rhythm was dreamy and slow, reminiscent of a hunt getting into action. Through intricate figures they advance to the lair. The "animal" keeps furtively clear, so like the slinking, lurking movements of the leopard, or advances into the open in the bravely insolent manner of the lion. Here it will double on its tracks. There it will hide behind cover until, with a rush of wildly swirling bodies, the quarry is sighted. Then grows the dance mad and furious. With many retreats and advances they weave their theme until the animal is wounded. How realistically this is portrayed by the staggering movements of the "animal" and the cautious inclosing of the "hunters". Sometimes actual weapons are carried giving a terrifying reality. At others they were left to the imagination, though if this had special significance one never discovered. Anyway, we have nothing on those dancers in realistic costume, or setting. They dance their ballet on the actual scenes of their story!

With what stark realism the quarry is cornered! This should be witnessed to be understood. The timorous dashes of the animal to escape! The relentless inclosing! The bounds and subterfuges of the quarry! Words alone cannot describe it. It must be seen to be properly grasped. Should the animal be wounded this is often given added realism by an imitation lionlike roar

eft to Right :

1) *The gourd wind instruments. These have a hole at the top, and often in the hole facing the camera they place a small "reed" pipe to give a wider range of notes.*

2) *This instrument is used by the ladies as a comb. Its use with their ballet is in the form of a plectrum used with No. 4.*

3) and (5) *Are their queer "thumb pianos" explained in the article. Note beads across notes for sound.*

4) *Is a specimen of the string instruments, whose "zum-zum" noise is very important, though very strange to western ears.*

6) *Is generally used in pairs, being beaten with blade against blade to give a "clacking" noise. They are porridge sticks in everyday use.*

nconquerable anger, or the fierce trumpeting of an phant, both never-to-be-forgotten sounds. The mal drops to the ground. Rolls over. Lies still. The hunters creep forward. They pause. They inch ward. They creep closer, until . . . a proud moment s for the leader of the mass dancers . . . he calls out . quarry is killed and places his foot proudly on the tim's neck, sign that the ballet is ended. Just like actual hunt, this. In the chase this contemptuous ion ends the battle, as does the finale of the ballet, in the chase joy is ever expressed by a wild, mad nce round the body of the victim.

But, you might ask, how do these savages manage to nce these intricate themes without music? They n't. They have music as primitive as their ballet. As with stage ballet, movement and music are wedded into one harmonious whole, but how weird and wonderful the orchestras are! At least to western ears!

The base of them is the drum, a giant requiring two stalwart warriors to carry. This is chosen with great ceremony, the whole village going into the forest to select the tree. Chopped down, with singing, often decorated with flowers for some unfathomable reason, it is dragged to the village with dancing, reminding one of the ritual dances of Europe. That their ballet is connected with their religious beliefs seems obvious, for boys and girls become men and women through dances which one was told were sexual orgies, but no white man ever witnessed these, and lived. In addition to the great drum, thumped with the clenched fist, they have

about six tom-toms, beaten with the flat hand, and a... number of wrist drums, like children's toys.

Each section has an important part to play in their ballet. The section leaders take their timing from them, inter-weaving intricately to make a rhythmic whole. Assume one section dancing to say, waltz time, another very slowly, a third with dazzling speed, yet all in harmony of rhythm, though of course, not in any known western timing. In this way they added a touch of excitement similar to the fear, danger, whatever you will, which every hunting man knows when sighting his quarry.

The string sections were composed of flat pieces of wood with upper sides slightly hollowed. Pierced top and bottom with a red hot spear point, string is threaded through the holes. Their sound is a faint "zum-zum-zum" hardly audible. What they call pianos are small boxes with six flattened iron nails in a fan pattern on top. These they play with the thumbs, making a twangy noise heard a great distance. A wind section is made with gourds, pierced with four or more holes emitting a high note, or when the holes are covered with paper, a bass one like that of comb and paper. Of course no description of Central African ballet would be complete without mentioning these weird instruments. Remember how much our own ballerinas depend on the orchestra!

They never appear to have developed a love theme but did the early Italian, French, or Russian ballets have such? With the African type in mind one assumes all ballet commenced with primitive themes such as the Africans still retain. Much later in time came fairy and demon themes such as we express in *Swan Lake, Casse Noisette ;* much later historical themes as of many operatic pieces. No! having lived amongst primitive dancers, one assumes early ballet themes had affinity with the chase or agriculture.

We pride ourselves on the advance of our art forms especially the ballet, yet, is there anything new under the sun? Ballet is certainly not new. It must have been very, very old in the seventeenth century, the date of its birth, which many assume. Possibly it is the oldest of humanity's art forms. How otherwise could it be such a factor in the lives of the earth's most primitive peoples, perhaps the last of the world's savage races, with whom I lived through dangerous years, and saw dancing their primitive ballet, away in primeval Central Africa?

TWO WEST AFRICAN DUNIA PERFORMED LAST YEAR AT THE ANGLO-FRENCH ART CENTRE

Photographs by Edward Mandinian

DANCE TO PROVE RECOVERY AFTER ILLNESS

A HUNTERS' DANCE

B.B.C. Photograph

SADLER'S WELLS THEATRE BALLET TELEVISED AT RADIOLYMPIA IN "LES SYLPHIDES"

THE BALLET AND TELEVISION

By MARY O'SHEA

TODAY ballet plays an important part in the planning of Television programmes. It is destined to play even greater one in the future.

On an average viewers see ballet from one to three, even four, times a month, and this may be anything om a short ten minutes to the whole of an evening's ansmission—from 8.30 to 10.0 p.m.

Apart from more or less regular performances which iewers have seen by companies such as The Ballet ambert, Sadler's Wells Theatre Ballet, The London allet, etc., famous visitors to London from overseas e invited to Alexandra Palace to give studio perfor- ances, and The Ballet Theatre of New York, Les Ballets des Champs-Elysées, and Colonel de Basil's Original Ballet Russe have appeared before the cameras since television recommenced in 1946. These internationally known dancers usually give two ballets, a classic (or part of one) and a more representative work.

Recently, the variety show *Stars in Your Eyes* has also featured ballet as its highlight with its "Stars of the Ballet" series, in which such well known artists as Beryl Grey and David Paltenghi, Nana Gollner and Paul Petroff, and Pamela May and Alexis Rassine have appeared in excerpts from the classics.

At the Radiolympia Exhibition last year, *Stars in Your Eyes* included a complete performance by the

Sadler's Wells Theatre Ballet of *Les Sylphides* (incidentally, even in television, the most frequently performed of all ballets). This was, of course, produced in the special television studio there and was thus seen by large numbers of visitors to the exhibition.

Ballet, being a composite art, requires the full contribution of artist, composer and choreographer to achieve its highest peak, so it is perhaps the lack of colour in present day television which is its biggest disadvantage to the ballet lover. However, despite this and the smallness of the average screen (a point which in any event only bothers viewers initially), it is surprising how satisfying televised ballet can be.

From the balletomane's point of view "white" ballet would seem to be perfect for the medium, but from the television producer's angle it is not so good. Apart from lack of contrast values, unless used very carefully all-white or all-black costumes or objects will cause the picture to "flare" or "streak". Red again is a colour which is avoided if possible. This is because different cameras have varying degrees of red-sensitivity and since a producer normally uses three cameras on a production, he may find that while his No. 1 camera makes the red object take on quite a light shade (perhaps almost as a grey would look), when he mixes to one of the others it will make the same object appear nearly black, and may also affect the rest of the picture.

Alexandra Palace today has two studios only, and neither is large. Besides this any production must be made to conform to the special requirements and limitations of the medium. The television producer, therefore, must either adapt ballet or use choreography specially created for this purpose. As yet there has been little of the latter, and none of outstanding merit, though it has great possibilities for the choreographer of vision and talent who is willing to study thoroughly the particular needs of television.

Of the most recent examples, Felicity Gray was the choreographer of *Liebeslieder*, a balletic interpretation of the song cycle by Brahms. *The Drunken Village*, a light-hearted tale of the unorthodox way in which one particular love story achieved its orthodox ending, was specially composed by Ruth Sendler for television as long ago as 1939 to music from Haydn's Symphonies, whilst before the war Joy Newton achieved considerable success with a ballet for children called *The Three Bears* to music by Eric Coates.

By far the largest and most important part of televised ballet is adapted, and during the past year viewers have seen excerpts from classics such as *Swan Lake*, *Casse Noisette*, *Coppélia*, *etc.* (Before the war they even saw the whole of *The Sleeping Princess!*) Also among ballets seen this year have been *Carnaval*, *Aurora's Wedding*, *Peter and the Wolf*, *Façade*, *Jardin aux Lilas*, *Les Forains*, and many others less well known.

Adaptation of ballet for the studio presents many difficulties. First, of course, is the lack of space. As mentioned earlier, Alexandra Palace has only two studios which must suffice to cover the needs of sometimes as many as six or seven different productions in one day. This means not only the space they require for the actual transmission time, but also for a complete camera rehearsal, and setting and lighting rehearsal. It is not unusual for one producer to be transmitting his programme from one end of the studio whilst another awaits the time of his on his own set at the opposite end. Ballet must therefore be presented in the most compact manner possible.

The amount of preparation needed to produce a ballet in the studio is enormous. The producer must see the ballet many times and take copious notes from which to evolve his script ; detailed studio plans must be drawn to scale and (when the time arrives) the floor must be marked for the dancers with chalk. Effects which must be achieved are worked out well ahead (sometimes with the choreographer) and camera positions and movements must be carefully planned. These are the main items; there are many lesser ones.

Lighting is another worry. Cameras in use at the moment require a tremendous amount of light to produce really good pictures, and this is often a major problem, especially where a particular scene or effect is contrived entirely by lighting.

A typical case in which the producer triumphed over this difficulty was when the American Ballet Theatre gave a performance of *On Stage!* in the studio. The two dream sequences in this ballet in which first the nervous would-be ballerina and afterwards the Chaplinesque handyman imagine themselves dancing with the two stars of the ballet were dealt with at Covent Garden by spotlighting the character concerned with the rest of the stage in complete darkness just before the dream sequence commenced. D. H. Munro, enthusiast and pioneer of televised ballet, created the same effect even more clearly and effectively in the studio by means of superimposition. Television is, of course, infinitely superior to the theatre in this respect, and miracles can be achieved by the imaginative use of television production technique. *On Stage!* incidentally, must surely be the only occasion on which the choreographer (Michael Kidd in this instance) not only co-operated with the producer in the television adaptation, but even spent a brief time in the control gallery with him before finally descending to play a leading role in the ballet during transmission.

Atmosphere, which, in ballet, can be so vitally important is sometimes difficult to capture in the studio, where lights, cameras and the general excitement and paraphernalia can occasionally conspire to wreck a ballet from this point of view. But this happens seldom, and the production of such works as *Les Forains* and *Jardin aux Lilas*, brought out to the full on the television

otograph by Keystone Press Agency

JEAN BABILÈE, READY FOR "BLUEBIRD" AND HOLDING HIS OWN CAMERA, WATCHES "LES FORAINS" BEING TELEVISED AT ALEXANDRA PALACE LAST YEAR

reen that delicacy of atmosphere which is such an tegral part of their make-up.

In this connection it must also be remembered that udio performances have, of necessity, no audience, d there is therefore no audience reaction (or "feel" as ncers put it) to help the artists.

As yet viewers have mainly seen transmissions from e studio, but in May last year ballet was televised rect from a theatre for the first time. The Outside roadcast Unit visited Covent Garden Opera House to levise the Sadler's Wells Ballet in *Symphonic Variations* d *The Three-Cornered Hat*, in which Leonide Massine ppeared. The cameras were not situated ideally nce they were barely above the level of the stage owing to the fact that the seats which the cameraman ould have preferred to use as camera positions had een sold).

In spite of this the programme as a whole was an amazingly successful one. *Symphonic Variations*, surprisingly enough, was not as suitable to the medium as would have been supposed. On the face of it the cast of only six dancers would appear to be ideal for the small television screen. In practice it did not turn out that way.

Early in the afternoon the producer asked the cast if they would work closer to the centre so that he could use a lens which would cover them all without having to take in the whole stage and thus dwarf them on the screen. This seemed to work fairly well at the camera rehearsal, but when the time of transmission arrived during the actual evening performance, somehow, alas, the dancers were back in their original positions. This illustrates clearly the main difference between production from the studio and on an outside

broadcast. Broadly, in the former case the ballet is adapted to television requirements, whilst in the latter the television requirements must somehow be adapted to the ballet.

However, apart from this and other minor problems, the fact that the six danced more or less constantly precluded to a large extent the satisfactory use of the close-up camera, because watching one or possibly two of them in close-up meant missing the dancing or grouping of the others and thus ruining the general line and continuity of the ballet (a most important factor in this particular case).

But if *Symphonic Variations* provided surprises, *The Three-Cornered Hat* provided more—this time all pleasant ones. Its ensemble scenes were animated and gay and filled the stage with movement without producing too jumbled a picture on the screen, and the general construction and choreography were ideal. Here the close-up camera came into its own with high spots such as the two solos of the Miller and those of the Miller's Wife, their *pas de deux*, and other memorable moments. The audience too, inspired the dancers to give of their best—(one of the advantages of outside broadcasts over the studios).

Colour again, was perfect in *The Three-Cornered Hat* and the décor and costumes could hardly have been better had they been specially created for television. Even the special lighting improved the ballet rather than otherwise for those in the theatre.

Lighting is perhaps an even greater problem on Outside Broadcasts, or O.Bs, as they are generally called, than in the studios. If the O.B. Unit visits a theatre it must take the performance exactly as it stands, since otherwise not only would the management refuse to allow it to be televised, but the patrons themselves would complain. Even then, the additional lighting which must be installed rules out, for the time being at any rate, any ballets whose action requires even momentarily, a dim or darkened stage.

Outside Broadcasts have recently used for the first

(*Continued at foot of column 1, next page*)

BALLET THEATRE'S "ON STAGE!" WITH NORA KAYE AND JOHN KRIZA, TELEVISED IN 1946

B.B.C. Photograph

PROFESSOR AGRIPPINA VAGANOVA

By ELENA ROSLAVLEVA

PART I.

NO one has described Vaganova's method better than the late Liubov Blok, prominent Russian scholar of ballet, widow of the poet Alexander Blok. With imaginative intuition she named it "scientific choreography", and nothing could suit Professor Vaganova's method better.

Vaganova gives her daily lesson at the Rehearsal Hall of the Leningrad School of Choreography, the same room where she had taken many a lesson from her own teachers—Christian Johannsen, Pavel Gerdt, Ekaterina Vazem, Nicolas Legat. On a windy Leningrad morning it is very chilly in that large room with its two rows of windows.

I found her sitting in an armchair set against the mirrored wall at the end of the room. Her pupils of the upper class had all come and bowed to her. While Vaganova's lesson is on there is an almost constant procession of dancers crossing the gallery which runs along the four walls of the room in that famous house of the no less famous Rossi (Theatre) Street. At this time of day it is usually some member of the Kirov Theatre company en route to the daily exercise in a classroom on the second floor. Each one never fails to bow and say "How do you do, Agrippina Yakovlevna?" In their voices there is still an echo of those days when she was their feared and most respected teacher, and it is fitting that it should be so.

Although her entire attention is concentrated on her class, Vaganova does not miss anything. In class she is terse, rather caustic, unsparing of criticism. She does not fail to speak her mind because she expects the same degree of devotion from her pupils to the difficult art they are learning as she herself has shown throughout her life. She observes the smallest defect. "Perhaps you think I have not noticed that. Well, I have." There is a point in all her remarks—she wants a state of constant alertness in her class. She makes every pupil repeat any incorrectly performed movement five or six times until she is satisfied.

Vaganova both explains and demonstrates perfectly. "Stretch yourself up as much as possible. All of your body and all of you should be tuned to making a *tour*. Both you and your body should know that you are going to perform a *tour*. Your arms should help you; place your arms correctly, and they will give you impetus and set you off."

Vaganova pays so much attention to the arms because in her own time pupils left the school with flabby, weak arms. She maintains that the arms should be strong, agile, alive. They play an extremely important part in many movements, particularly in jumps and *tours*. "Clever" arms are a vital part of her system. She never fails to remind her pupils: "Help yourself with your arms."

Those who are inattentive or commit some fault meet with heaviest penalty. They have to leave the line and stand aside. At last a small voice may be heard: "Agrippina Yakovlevna, may I take my place?" The answer is definitely in the negative; there is unfortunately no doubt about that. A little later, "Agrippina Yakovlevna, may I?"—"You have learnt it now, haven't you? Take your place. Quickly."

Even when the time to change shoes arrives the same brightness and tempo is demanded and there is a famous maxim of Vaganova's for the occasion : "One who cannot change her shoes and water the floor cannot do anything."

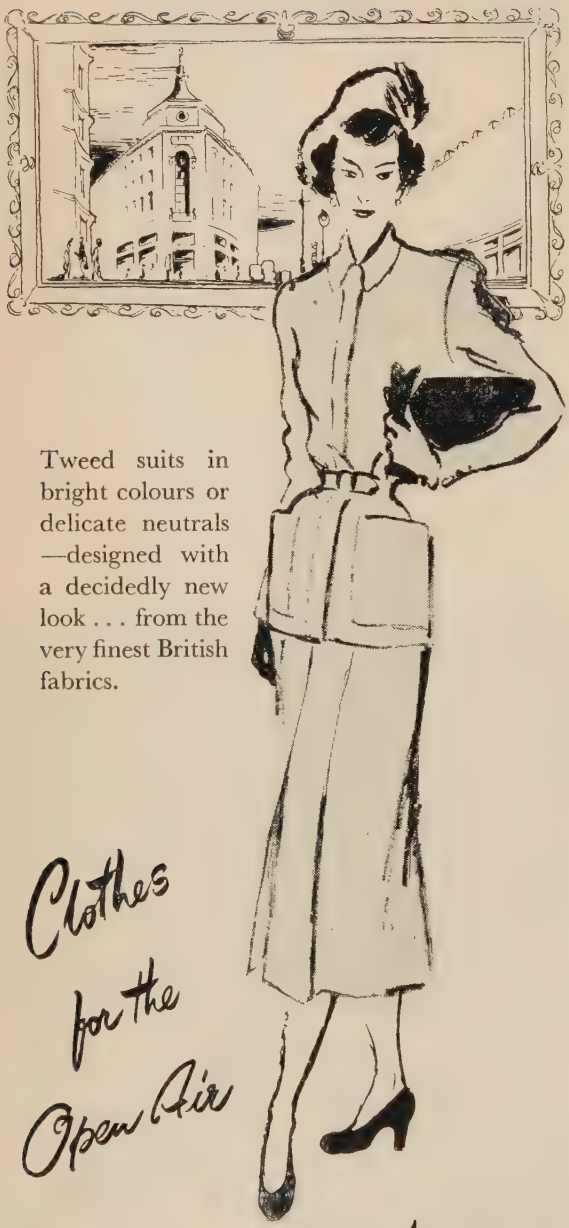
While she demands perfect conformity with classical line and method, she allows individual deviations or adaptations to the pupil's own build. "You know you have a small *plié*—work at it." "You know that your back is weak—watch your own defects, correct them." "Learn this step at home. Repeat it many times.

(*continued from previous page*)

me at the Royal Wedding and again for the visit of eir Majesties to Broadcasting House, the new British P.S. Emitron cameras. These are so much more nsitive than those at present in use that they will entually eliminate the necessity of any extra lighting all. These new cameras—there are at present only o—are still in the experimental stage. It may be me time before both studios and Outside Broadcast nits are permanently equipped with them, but they e definitely on the way. When this happens we n look forward to seeing much more ballet televised rect from the theatre.

In the past, good ballet has been the prerogative of ose who live in or near large cities and towns. In e homes of the future, people who have, perhaps, ever even been inside a theatre will be able to switch h their television sets and see first-class ballet (ballet which colour will play its true part, for even colour levision is only a matter of time) in the same way that ey can now switch on their radios and hear a symphony ncert; for one day ballet will be to television what assical music is to radio.

However, that is in the future. For the moment tele-sed ballet has much that is new and interesting to offer, d I, for one, am quite content to wait and watch.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And don't forget to remind me that I told you to do it." "I cannot make you do this, you must command your own body."

Vaganova has no set lesson. There is no "menu" for the week as in the Cecchetti class because she thinks that while a systematic lesson teaches a steady and mechanical correctness of execution and a firm line, the varied lesson consisting of newly invented *enchaînements* awakens the pupil's dormant attention, training him or her to be ready for unexpected combinations of steps and sudden difficulties. Her school teaches to think, to react, to be alert, to take part in the creative work which daily occurs in her class. Anyone who expected languid *developpés* and gentle *posés* at her lesson, anyone who came in anticipation of something decorative would be disappointed. What we are witnessing is that wise choreography so aptly named by Liùbov Blok. Yes, it is the classical school, studied, analysed and applied until it has reached the state of self-commanding wisdom. Vaganova has not merely studied the various forms of classical dance; she has understood their very architecture. She has mastered the laws of movement and knows how to work each lever. She expects each of the pupils to learn how to be master of her body after she has been supplied with the essential certitudes of the Vaganova method.

Each of her *enchaînements* is built with a practical consideration of the muscles which will be set in motion. There is nothing decorative about them. If necessary they will be unpleasant to the eye, but useful. There is nothing cursory, nothing that is not purposeful. Many teachers are quite naturally capable of composing *enchaînements*. But usually there will be only one or two essentially useful steps, the rest are "dressing" used to keep the structure together. The "one, two, three" might be useful, but the "four, five, six" could easily be done without as far as the pupil's benefit is concerned. With Vaganova there simply cannot be any "dressing". She apparently has reached the state when she can think only in terms of such beneficial movement. It has become her second nature. If she observes a *pas de bourrée* in her *enchaînement* which does not of necessity have to be there, she will remove it.

It is not a mere question of the wisdom of maturity. Age has nothing to do with it. She is much younger than many young teachers of the school who merely faithfully follow her method. She never stops growing.

The moulding of her system was not based only on Italian, French, Russian methods within the Russian school at the time when she became its recognised leader, but on everything she has observed around her. She saw that the growing, developing Soviet ballet needed new, stronger material to work with. She took in something from each of the works of Soviet choreographers. But on the other hand, the extremely fruitful period of the Leningrad ballet before the war, when

was literally the laboratory of Soviet ballet, turning out such *premières* as *Flame of Paris*, *Laurencia*, *Heart of the Hills*, *Romeo and Juliet*, is due in no small measure to Vaganova's work. She has produced a company with a uniform, compact technique, a definite style which has left far behind the rather uneven style and technique of the preceding decade. Beginning with 1925, she started putting out such pupils as Semyonova—representing a new quality belonging to Soviet ballet alone.

(To be concluded in the May issue.)

Balletomane's Bookshelf

BALLET REVIEW. (The Albyn Press, 5s. net.)

This is the first appearance of a new annual of which the principal section is devoted to a survey of "Ballets of the Year", in this instance the period covered being the whole of 1946 and up to June, 1947. These reviews have the appearance of having been farmed out to several different people and assembled haphazardly with no regard to relative importance, so that a solo dance in the Anglo-Polish repertoire gets five times the space allotted to Balanchine's *Apollo*, and so on. In the symposium "The Spectator and the Ballet", Mr. C. W. Beaumont has this to say:—"A person who has seen Karsavina and Nijinsky dance *Le Spectre de la Rose* or Spessivtzeva dance the Princess Aurora in *The Sleeping Princess* will have a quite different conception of what those roles should and can be, than those who have not enjoyed such privileges." The articles in general are for the most part too short and perfunctory to do justice to their subjects, but for that sentence alone *Ballet Review* is worth the modest five shillings charged.

BRIEF FOR BALLET. By Kathrine Sorley Walker. (Pitfield Publishing Company, 10s. 6d. net.)

This is intended primarily as a handbook for newcomers to Ballet. As such it fulfils its purpose admirably. It is divided into three sections, the first giving a brief survey of the historical background out of which Ballet as we know it today has developed. The second, called "Appreciation", is a kind of personal guide round the factors which go to making a ballet and the third section deals with the contemporary English scene. Miss Sorley Walker succeeds fairly well in being objective, and though the book reveals that she has her own personal predelictions (and who hasn't?), she forestalls criticism on that score by pointing out that this is invariably the case and warning her readers against taking anyone's opinion without due consideration. We are therefore at liberty to nod approvingly when our views coincide with hers and to shake our heads and say "Ah, that's just her prejudice" when they do not. She is also unusually sensible in her

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attitude to the perennial battle about favourite dancers and I agree with her when she says—"A fallacy that many uphold is that for anyone to have a special admiration for some particular artist means that they are oblivious to any faults or mistakes which occur in that artist's work", though I think she continues by linking it too dangerously with personal feelings. The book ends with a list of books suggested as being "most calculated to give a good general background", but surely the late W. A. Propert's two books on the Diaghilev Ballet in London and Peter Lieven's "Birth of Ballets-Russes", though admittedly hard to find these days, are infinitely more valuable than the numerous books of posed photographs here suggested, and if books of photographs are essential, why not mention the best of them all, Merlyn Severn's "Ballet in Action"?

THE SWAN LAKE. A Photographic Record by Russell Sedgwick. The Story of the Ballet by Cyril W. Beaumont. (C. W. Beaumont, 25s. net.)

This is a companion volume to *The Sleeping Beauty* arranged in the same way, with Mr. Beaumont telling the story as it is performed by Sadler's Wells Ballet, followed by a photographic record act by act. Unfortunately all the photographs are those taken when this production was first seen at the New Theatre in 1943 so that the sets now look very cramped, and quite a number of the dancers shown are either no longer with the company or no longer dance the parts in which they are here depicted.

BALLET ANNUAL. Edited by Arnold L. Haskell. (A. & C. Black, 21s. net.)

As expected, with this second issue Ballet Annual finds its stride and has developed into an indispensable record of a year's events. Amongst the many good articles two of particular importance are by Simon Fleet on the work of Sophie Fedorovitch and by C. W. Beaumont on Cecchetti as a teacher in London. There are a large number of excellent new photographs and altogether the book is wonderful value for a guinea.

AND THEN HE DANCED. By Edouard Espinosa. (Sampson Low, Marston & Co. Ltd., 18s. net.)

This is an entrancing book in which the author relates with gusto and an endearing good humour the story of his long career. Closely linked as it was with the late Victorian and Edwardian era, it brings back the great days of music-hall and pantomime and the giants of those days with whom and for whom he worked. It is full of surprises, not least that of learning that Espinosa did not start serious dance training until he was sixteen. I have always imagined that all Espinosas were born wearing ballet shoes. Another surprise is that both he and his father, the famous Leon Espinosa, of whom he writes with touching affection and admiration, worked for a considerable time with Irving. Although the author is not concerned with the subject, one can realise from this book how unimportant ballet in this country was considered until the arrival of the Russian Ballet.

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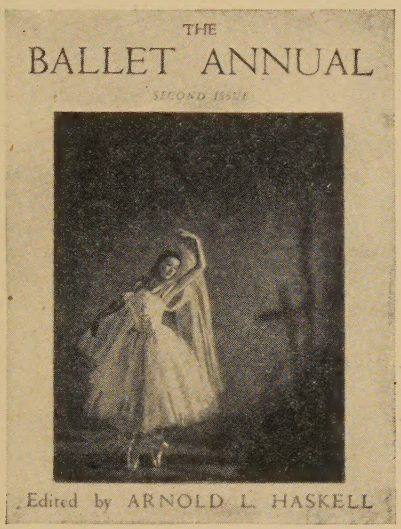

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The second number of this Annual is even more compendious and representative than the first, of which very few copies remain of the large number printed. It contains contributions by the leading authorities on aspects of the ballet during the year in Britain, Russia, France, the U.S.A. and elsewhere, with substantial archive and reference material which adds to the book's permanent value.

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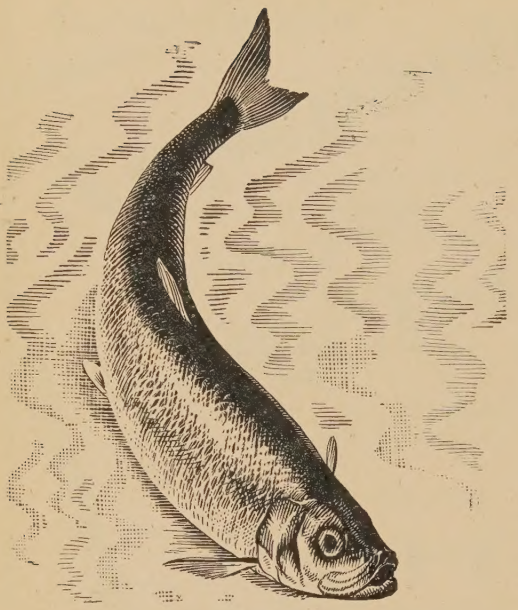

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Espinosa rarely expresses his views on ballet either from a technical or artistic standpoint and such tastes of his own regarding music and décor as emerge seem based on the standards obtaining in the variety halls at the beginning of the century; but as a vivid picture of a period which is irrevocably past, this book is not only fascinating but valuable. P.W.M.

The American Ballet Scene (continued from page 9)

corps de ballet. Of these ballets the greatest is *Serenade*. Here Balanchine uses figures in space, both individually and in groups, in a manner which has been approached only by certain passages in Massine's symphonic works. Of the same type and only slightly inferior are *Concerto Barocco* and *Ballet Imperial*.

At the time of writing Ballet Russe is scheduled to begin its spring season of one month in New York on February 15th. At this time *Billy Sunday*, a new ballet by Ruth Page, will have its *première*. After an absence of many years, *Giselle* will be restored to the active list, presumably in the Benois settings previously used by this company. The roles of Giselle and Albrecht will be taken by Danilova and Franklin with Mary Ellen Moylan as Myrtha. This should be an interesting revival.

Several important questions face Ballet Russe at present. One is how to discard the name Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo which no longer has any real meaning. Another is concerned with the fact that since 1943 the company has emphasised the names, as well as the dancing, of Danilova and Franklin to too great an extent. It is apparent that this situation cannot be continued indefinitely. Danilova is still a great artist, but the years of hard work, of dancing in two and three ballets in one evening, are having their effect. She retains her full power as an actress, but that her strength is diminishing is not surprising. There are good young dancers in the company, Krassovska, Boris and Moylan, but audiences have grown accustomed to think of Danilova as synonymous with Ballet Russe. Franklin has likewise dominated the scene on the male side. He is still young and can and does dance in a tremendous proportion of the ballets, but his absence for even a week causes serious casting difficulties. Danielian cannot handle the full load himself and there is no other adequate replacement. Franklin is a fine dancer and has done a good job of directing Ballet Russe, but has overworked himself to the detriment of both the company and himself.

It is difficult and unnecessary to attempt to decide which of these two companies is the better. Both have much to offer—good ballets and first-rate artists. There is, of course, competition, but this is to the advantage of both and particularly to the advantage of the ballet audience for whom the season of one company is a complement to the season of the other.

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